

## Two Towns, One Family

A creative interpretation based on documented history

by Cheryl Threadgold.

### Characters

<b>FRENCH TEACHER</b>	Mature age. Speaks a few words of French.
<b>STUDENT</b>	Female 10 – 13 years. Australian or English.
<b>BERNIE</b>	Teenage male or female.
<b>LADY TOWNSPERSON</b>	40-50 years. Australian accent. 1919 – 1925 era.
<b>BRITISH AIRMAN</b>	English accent. 20-35 years. Era: 1916 – 1925
<b>BBC NEWSREADER</b>	Well-spoken, English accent. Era: 1916 – 1925.

### Synopsis:

In May, 1918, six months before the Armistice on 11 November, Australian airman, Lieutenant George Robin Cuttle MC came under fatal attack during a bombing mission behind enemy lines near Caix, ten kilometres from Villers-Brettonneux in northern France. Driven by love and loyalty, Robin's family members in country Victoria were determined to find the wreckage of his plane. In 1984, the towns of Villers-Brettonneux in France and Robinvale in Australia, became twinned. The strong connection between the two towns is a fine tribute to the heroism of men such as George Robin Cuttle and his fellow allied servicemen.

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(a radio play written by Cheryl Threadgold)

### Scene 1. French Class in Australian Junior School.      Modern Day.

**AUDIO:**                    **Student chatter in background which stops when teacher speaks.**

**TEACHER:**            Bonjour les étudiant! Time for lessons. Hands up please for first question about France.

**STUDENT:**            (*CALLS OUT*) Bonjour, Madame. Can you please tell us about Villers Bretonneux?

**TEACHER:**            (*ENTHUSIASTICALLY WITH FRENCH ACCENT*) Oui. Villers Bretonneux is a town in Northern France. Since 1984, a road sign proudly tells visitors that its twin town is ‘Robinvale’, in Australia.

**STUDENT:**            Why does it have a twin town?

**TEACHER:**            Well, the people of Villers Bretonneux never forgot the kind support given by Australian, British and Canadian soldiers during the first World War. Hotels and streets are named after Australian cities, and Rue de Melbourne runs through the town’s centre. The Australian flag and the French Tricolor fly side by side at a huge war memorial. And at the local primary school, both flags stand together in a classroom.

**STUDENT:**            Where is Robinvale?

**TEACHER:**            Use your laptop. Search for it ...

**AUDIO: Keys typing on laptop**

**STUDENT:**            Umm ... here it is. (*READS FROM SCREEN*) Robinvale. Robinvale is in Australia, in north-western Victoria. A bridge connects Robinvale to Euston on the other side of the Murray River.

**TEACHER:**            The village centre in Villers Bretonneux is named Robinvale.

**STUDENT:**            (*READING LAPTOP SCREEN*) And Robinvale has a Caix Square.

**TEACHER:** The Robinvale Euston Regional War Memorial Park also commemorates the special connection between Robinvale and Villers Bretonneux.

**STUDENT:** The website talks of (*READS CAREFULLY*) Lieutenant George Robin Cuttle MC. Does that stand for ‘Military Cross’?

**TEACHER:** Yes. Robinvale Square in Villers Bretonneux pays tribute to ...  
(*CLEARLY ARTICULATES NAME*) Robin ... Cuttle MC ...

## Scene 2. BBC Radio News 1917

**AUDIO: Crackly Wireless**

**BRITISH NEWSREADER:**

Today, 12<sup>th</sup> of May, 1917, Australian airman Lieutenant George Robin Cuttle was decorated with the Military Cross at Buckingham Palace by His Majesty, King George V. The citation read: ‘He displayed great courage and determination in endeavouring to relieve a wounded observations officer under intense fire. He sent back information by lamp signal from time to time and was on duty continuously for some twenty hours’.

## Scene 3. 2018. A Melbourne Loungeroom

**BERNIE:** It’s over 100 years now since World War One ended. Mum talks about my great great-grandfather, Angus, returning home from that war and becoming a share farmer on the Bumbang Estate, on the banks of the Murray River. Mr Herbert Cuttle and his wife Margaret were owners of the Bumbang Homestead. Mum says that years later my great great grandfather would relate the heroic, yet sad story of Mr and Mrs Cuttle’s second son, George Robin Cuttle, and of the family’s unswerving determination to find their missing son. And how the town became named Robinvale.

**AUDIO: Outdoor effects – Birds**

#### **Scene 4. 1919. Robinvale, Australia**

**LADY TOWNSPERSON:** We were so thrilled up here when Robin got his Military Cross. (*IN AWE*) Fancy him going to *Buckingham Palace!* (*MATTER OF FACT*) The Cuttle family purchased the college lease property here known as “The Cliffs”, just across the Murray River from Euston. Their son George, better known as ‘Robin’, left Caulfield Grammar school at the age of 16 to manage the grazing and cropping property.

(*SIGHS*) Then World War 1 broke out and Robin enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force., but he was rejected by the doctor ... allegedly for his eyesight.

(*CONFIDENTIALLY*) But we thought it was due to his size. You see, Robin was tall, 6 foot 6 inches, and weighed over 220 pounds! (*PROUDLY*) But that boy was *determined* to join the forces, and was advised to sail for England and try for the Royal Flying Corps.

(*REMEMBERING*) He was such a good boy – loved his farm, and waited for a severe drought to improve before finally sailing on 29<sup>th</sup> November, 1915.

#### **Scene 5. 1919. England.**

**BRITISH AIRMAN:** Robin was gazetted as a second Lieutenant in the Royal Field Artillery in the special Reserve of Officers in July, 1916. He obtained a commission in the Artillery to gain Gunnery experience and a transfer to the Royal Flying Corps. However, the Royal Flying Corps rejected Robin for being too tall and heavy for the flying machines. So, he rejoined the Royal Field Artillery and, at age 20, left for the Somme in France.

#### **Scene 6. 1919. Robinvale, Australia**

**LADY TOWNSPERSON:** Robin’s mother told us about his letters. We said it wouldn’t be too long before the war would be over and he would be back home again.

## **Scene 7. 1919. England.**

### **BRITISH AIRMAN:**

Lieutenant George Robin Cuttle was acting Captain with the Royal Field Artillery in the ‘glorious 9<sup>th</sup>’ being attached to the Royal Scots. He returned to France on the 15<sup>th</sup> May, 1917 and fought in the Battle of Arras, and according to his war record, “assisted in the working of captured enemy guns”.

But Cuttle wanted to fly, so while waiting to transfer to the Royal Flying Corps, he continued training. He was tall, nicknamed ‘Tiny’ by fellow officers, and took every opportunity to fly, visiting Hendon and other airfields.

In late 1917, conditions for entry into the Royal Flying Corps changed, and Cuttle joined as an observer on photo reconnaissance flights and bombing missions.

## **Scene 8. 1919. Robinvale, Australia.**

### **LADY TOWNSPERSON:**

Robin wrote to his mother that he was the only observer with the squadron who used two Lewis guns joined together. This was because as they were heavier, the others were not strong enough to move them about in the confined space of a cockpit while flying.

## **Scene 9. 1919. England**

**BRITISH AIRMAN:** Cuttle’s pilot was a Canadian, Lieutenant Leckie, and their plane was named ‘Tuff Guys.’ They were a successful team, bringing down a number of enemy planes.

(SERIOUS) However, their luck ran out on 9<sup>th</sup> May, 1918. They were attacked when returning from a successful bombing raid on ammunition trains in the German occupied French town of Peronne.

Robin’s best chum Victor Dreschfeld, was also on the bombing raid and wrote “ ... the formation was attacked by a vastly superior number of Hun triplanes, five of which were brought down during the fight. Cuttle’s machine was seen to go down, apparently well under control ...”

Another artillery friend wrote “Tiny put up a grand fight bringing down two machines before he received his fatal wound”.

### **Scene 10. 1919. Robinvale, Australia.**

#### **LADY TOWNSPERSON:**

When news came through that Robin Cuttle was missing in action, it was a terrible time for the Cuttles and our whole district. The Armistice was announced on 11 November, 1918 and at last we had peace. But poor Mr and Mrs Cuttle were devastated. Not only was their 22-year-old son missing, but searches in France failed to find any sign of the wreckage.

### **Scene 11. 2018. Melbourne Lounge Room**

#### **BERNIE:**

My great great grandfather writes in his diary that after the War, the Cuttle family was determined to find their beloved son and brother. He says Mrs Margaret Cuttle and her daughter travelled all the way to France in 1923 to search for him. French locals and members of the 49<sup>th</sup> Squadron led them to a crater in a field near Caix, 10 kilometres from Villers-Bretonneux. It was thought the wreckage indicated there had been a bomb still aboard the DH-9 when the machine crashed. Robin's plane had been found, but after much searching, they could not find his body.

### **Scene 12. 1925. Robinvale, Australia**

#### **LADY TOWNSPERSON:**

Seven years on, it is hard to believe that Robin Cuttle is gone. He would be so proud of his mother and sister travelling all that way to France to find his plane when others could not.

Once the railway reached us last year, there was a special opening of the Cuttles' land sale at the new railway station. Robin's mother embroidered a piece of hessian with flowers and the words 'Robin Vale', meaning 'Farewell Robin'. This greeted the special train from Bendigo carrying prospective buyers to the land auction of their new township on the 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1924. And so Robinvale took its name.

### Scene 13. 1925. England

**BRITISH AIRMAN:** The Arras Flying Services Memorial in France commemorates the 1000 airmen (including Robin), of the Royal Naval Air Service, the RFC, and the RAF who lost their lives on the Western Front, and who have no known grave.

### Scene 14. 2018. Melbourne Lounge Room

**BERNIE: (POSITIVE)** The Cuttle family commissioned three fine stained-glass windows as a lasting memorial to their son, George Robin Cuttle, MC. These memorial windows were relocated to St Peter's Anglican Church in Robinvale in 2009. When the towns of Villers Bretonneux and Robinvale became twinned in 1984, the Cuttle family donated Robin's uniform to the Villers Bretonneux Museum, which is located above the village school.

### Scene 15. 2018. Junior School French Class

**STUDENT:** Madame, what is an 'Armistice'?

**TEACHER:** It is an agreement between those at war that fighting will stop.

**STUDENT:** So, if the Armistice had happened six months earlier in 1918, Robin Cuttle could have gone safely home to his family?

**TEACHER:** Oui. Such is the tragedy of war.

**STUDENT:** I hope *I* never experience war and have to leave my family. We need peace.

**TEACHER:** Peace, paix, - one of the most precious words in any language. In a war, peace comes at a price for many.

**STUDENT:** The suffering from a war has united *two towns and one family*.

## **Scene 16. 2018. A Melbourne Lounge Room**

**BERNIE:**                    There are now many tributes to keep alive the memory of Lieutenant George Robin Cuttle MC and the extraordinary love and determination of his family. But perhaps the most significant lasting tribute was the renaming of the new settlement on the Murray River in 1924. Robinvale. Vale, Robin. (*LAST WORDS SPOKEN SLOWLY AND DELIBERATELY*)

**Audio:**                    **AUSTRALIAN MUSIC**

**Closing Credits**

**Fade Out.**

**References:** Historic material for this radio play was obtained from various sources, including the Robinvale Regional War Memorial website titled 'Lieutenant George Robin Cuttle MC'.